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ABSTRACT

Reasons favoring the maintenance of foreign language requirements in public schools and colleges are developed in this essay in terms of international understanding and practical application of the second language. Five goals and accomplishments of current programs are examined in an attempt to determine whether recent linguistic methods produce results which justify the language requirement. Some discussion of motivation, methodology, and flexible scheduling is included. (RL)

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LIBERAL ARTS LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Dorothy Wirtz

Periodically, the value of the liberal arts language requirement is questioned and sometimes reduced or abolished, followed by serious consequences. This seems to be as inevitable as the seasons.

Foreign language study in America has always been a sometime affair (now emphasized, now neglected), in spite of the Army Service Training Program of World War II and the new methods which grew out of it. Paul A. Miller, Assistant Secretary for Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, has said that foreign language study is often no more than a casual nod to convention and that language at the graduate level is for most a shallow charade. Mr. Miller is persuaded, however, that competence in one or more of the major world languages other than one's own is the key prerequisite in the curriculum, and our present curriculum must be carefully articulated and planned in anticipation of the coming revolution in international education.[1]

This comment alone, expressing the concept that the education of modern man will be incomplete unless it includes the integrated experience of a foreign culture, plus the fact that in many institutions of the nation the requirement of foreign language for the undergraduate degree *is* being reduced or abolished, are enough to motivate us to reassess the part that languages play in the liberal arts curriculum. We should be reexamining our philosophy, our course offerings, and our methods, and making known our belief in those values. Naturally, when the foreign language requirement is removed from an institution's curriculum, enrollment figures in foreign languages may tend to plunge downward, and teachers may be urged to move elsewhere, if not out of the profession. Then the nation may be caught unprepared when an emergency arises, having discarded something of value.

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In Theory

Let us answer theoretical questions first. In theory, what are the reasons for having such a requirement?

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[1]Paul A. Miller, Sixth Annual Grady Gammage Memorial Lecture at Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, February 6, 1967, in his lecture entitled "The Approaching Revolution in International Education," quoted in *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 1/ No. 2 (December 1967), 107. In the Seventh Annual Grady Gammage Memorial Lecture, "The Present Crisis in Foreign Relations and International Education", February 13, 1968, Dr. Glen L. Taggart, Dean of International Programs, Michigan State University, reiterated that Americans need an international education structure that provides deeper insights, knowledge, and skills with respect to other cultures.

Language is primarily a humanistic study, a necessary antidote to mechanization. True, the science of linguistics has made a place for itself, but if we are to have international understanding, the humanistic study of languages is the meeting place for separate minds and cultures. This is one hope for contributing more to peace and understanding. If our leaders knew more about the Asian mind, we perhaps would not be in our present dilemma. We must militate against the snobbish idea that anything worth saying is worth saying in one language only. This is pure arrogance. We must provide the student wide acquaintance with at least one culture other than his own, so that he may learn more about humanity from other cultures, and that his is not necessarily the superior one in all respects. We must never forget that idea dear to enlightened thinkers of the Renaissance as described in *Des Cannibales* of Montaigne: so-called "savages" are sometimes more advanced than ourselves. Tolerance comes often with understanding another culture. The eighteenth century *philosophes*, Diderot in particular,[2] echoed the thought of Montaigne two centuries later.

The Latin language, in the Middle Ages, united people from all parts of Europe. Professors and students could move from one university to another and students sometimes even followed the most illustrious professors from one country to the next. Today, not one but many languages are necessary, ideally, to follow modern universal thought. One simply cannot know enough languages to keep up even a superficial acquaintance with the explosion in knowledge.

In the case of French, for example, we know that we have drawn heavily on the cultural heritage of France in the United States. Though French has declined in its importance as a diplomatic language, it is still a major one. It is well known that French was used for three centuries as the language of Europe's cultivated elite and is now a language of the masses, of millions of persons who are being called to play an important part in international life. In modern times, both English and French have been useful as political instruments since 1918, when the Treaty of Versailles was drawn up in both languages. The Second World War struck the real blow to the prestige of French. In 1946 the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York adopted French as a working language by a margin of only one vote. During more recent sessions, representatives of twenty-four member nations used nothing but French from the rostrum, regardless of whether it was their official language or not. A dozen others generally used French or did so relatively often, while a few others used it from time to time. Thus, an average of 35 out of the 103 delegations, more than a third of the member nations, normally still used French in 1962 at the United Nations. Even behind the Iron Curtain, world powers realized the importance of French in their relations with Africa. The stress laid upon

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[2]In his *Supplément aux voyages de Bougainville.*

the teaching of French in the school systems of many countries reflect this concern and the pride the French take in disseminating their language and their culture.[3]

The second reason for studying languages and one with more practical application is the learning of skills in a foreign language, which will not only throw new light on one's own native tongue, but will also be useful in many other ways. Practical application of language is being able to speak, understand, read, and write in order to travel, study abroad, become teachers of language or read in the foreign language only for pleasure or in one's field.

What goals should a foreign language program have, theoretically?

The goals of a foreign language program should be very much the same as they now are, but with better and increased implementation, and perhaps more experimentation. A recent Harvard report[4] recommends these methods for more effective teaching:

1) Long exposure–start study at an early age.

2) Take many literature courses at the college level (or even before, once the Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools programs and Advanced Placement programs, or "Advanced Deplacement" programs–as they have been nicknamed–get under way).

3) Study with teachers who make use of the foreign language by conducting class in the language and requiring the students to use the language.

4) Travel and study abroad.

5) Employment in job situations.

What types of courses should we stress, if goals that justify a language requirement are to be met? In accordance with the above report, literature courses, in particular should be included. But once enough of the foreign language is mastered, all types of courses should be given in the foreign language, because language is the instrument of all learning. Give courses in French, for example, in related fields, such as history and civilization, English literature (texts in the original, discussion and lectures in French), drama, political science, philosophy, semantics, geography, anthropology, art, music, and humanities. In our part of the country, especially, the international revolution is already taking place because of the prominence of Spanish as a second language. We should offer courses such as those suggested by Reports on Bilingual Education Research and Teaching made at the Annual Conference of the Southwest Council of Foreign Language Teach-

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[3]"The Direction of Cultural Affairs in France," an Interview with Jean Basdevant, Directeur Général des Affaires Culturelles et Techniques, *Education in France*, No. 18 (May 1962), p. 2.

[4]John B. Carroll, *The Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year – A Survey Conducted in U.S. Colleges and Universities*, Laboratory for Research in Instruction, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1967, p. 205 (Chap. XI, 10, "Recommendations for the Improvement of the Education of Foreign Language Majors").

ers.[5] The gist of these reports is that Spanish-speaking students learn subjects such as social sciences, history, and mathematics better if they are taught in Spanish. It may be a little idealistic to imagine we can do all this when we are still trying to get students to do basic mechanics of the language, but we must look ahead.

In Practice

In practice, what are the goals and accomplishments of current programs, and do current linguistic methods produce results that justify a language requirement?

Current goals seem justifiable in light of the order of concentration of skills recommended by the profession. In light of current linguistic methods and experimentation with new subject matter in the foreign language, we have made only a small beginning.

Goal No. 1—long and wide exposure—is immediately challenged and endangered, because, except in language "factories" (not used in the derogatory sense), such as the Monterey Language School in California, or the Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management in Glendale, Arizona, language teachers and students are allowed to spend only limited time in the classroom or laboratory and learn only the rudiments. There are other subjects besides languages in the student's curriculum, but in our profession we are expected to exhibit the kind of genius that teaches an entire language in two years while meeting our students four or five hours a week at the most. Administrators often seem convinced, on the other hand, that some "crash" program exists, whereas a lifetime is hardly long enough for learning one's own native language properly.

Goal No. 2—taking many literature courses at the college level—is not always possible, particularly if the student never reaches college or advanced work in high school or before. Besides, some even in the profession do not agree with this goal. Others do: "On the advanced level it is possible for the student to approach the rich offerings of French literature with pleasure and profit and at the same time strengthen his control of the language, its vocabulary, structures, and cultural traditions."[6] The usefulness of the study of literature in the original text is hardly to be questioned: "In general, the teaching of foreign literatures in their original language is somewhat more creditable than is the teaching of the English and American literatures, while the use of translations in literature courses leads to such abuse that it ought perhaps to be abandoned completely until such time as the general level

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[5]Reports on Bilingual Education Research and Teaching, Chester Christian, Editor, November 10-11, 1967, El Paso, Texas Annual Conference Southwest Council of Foreign Language Teachers.

[6]*Curriculum Guide for French*, Phoenix Union High School System, prepared by Mrs. Janis Carlson, Alhambra High School, Miss Phyllis Durnin, West High School, Mrs. Martha Nelson, Camelback High School, Mr. Pete Navarrete, Maryvale High School (June 1967), p. 1.

of sophistication in matters linguistic is such that translations can safely be included among texts to be normally studied as literature."[7]

For literature is cast in language. Professor Edgerton, Chairman, Department of Spanish at Bucknell University, points out that as things now stand, in our world of unsettled values, literature "runs a very serious risk of being abandoned as a useless and, in any case, arcane frill, the cost of which is no longer justifiable. . . . Teachers of literature ought to be the best educated of all academicians, and their task—teaching students how to *read* —ought to be the most valuable and the most challenging of all. As is, we all too often confuse our own poor reflections on literature with the content of the works themselves, thus serving no one well" (p. 130).

Goal No. 3—study with teachers who know and use the language—is also often short-changed, if the unqualified are allowed to teach—and they are—by those who are not strict enough in their early evaluations of students' language talents and performance, or by state departments of public instruction or school administrations which, in desperation, hire teachers whose qualifications are insufficient.

Goal No. 4—travel and study abroad—is often economically not feasible for all. True, many exchange programs for teachers and more and more studer programs abroad are available, but they require money, and some programs leave much to be desired. There is *no* substitute for this kind of experience, but let us not discount the fact that it *is* possible to learn a foreign language and learn it well in this country where so many native speakers and well-qualified Americans are practicing the profession.

Goal No. 5—employment in job situations—is a fine goal *after* the student has proved his mettle, but where can he find on-the-job training in languages sufficient to help him when he needs help, except in practice teaching? This area of on-the-job "employment" has possibilities in the classroom itself with more experimentation in the tutorial system. The older students teach the younger ones, the brighter ones teach the slower ones, etc. Creative teachers conduct many ordinary classes like seminars, in which students learn on their own and from each other.

Underlying our failure in meeting all of these goals is poor motivation on the part of the disinterested student. Present emphasis on education drives him to school, but without a real desire to learn and the only desire is to obtain the necessary grades to acquire the necessary paper that says he has graduated from an accredited college or university. Perhaps instead of abolishing or reducing the language requirement, we should consider some nationwide screening process for language students, so that only the apt and motivated, those with clearcut verbal aptitude, are allowed to continue in the profession; but we should not reject all students wholesale.

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[7]Mills F. Edgerton, Jr., "A Linguistic Definition of Literature," *Foreign Language Annals*, Vol. 1/No. 2 (December 1967), 129.

For their own good, all students should be given an adequate chance to learn a foreign language. Good teaching sometimes motivates the student, and the profession has the motivating power for the teachable.

But in present practice, besides trying to teach the unteachable, we must also cope with "fad" methodology. We try to do too much too soon. Current linguistic methods are fine for beginning skills, i.e., listening and speaking. If the student wishes to speak and comprehend the language only—and just a few phrases at that—perhaps we are doing the job. Current methods have not proved so brilliant for advanced skills, reading and writing.[8] The patter of patterns has often created bad habits where advanced conversation, literature, and composition are concerned, for it has not allowed for natural development and flexibility of expression. Pattern language is even worse. It is anti-humanistic. It is insulting to bright students capable of grasping all the subtleties of the language to be limited to pattern talk or travel language when they could be grappling with ideas. Pattern language does not rise to the occasion.

Why don't we face the fact that failure to offer solid reading and training in grammar are general weaknesses in the profession, both in our high school and college programs, because we fail to insist that students master the meaning-carrying elements of language: a) intonation, rhythm, pronunciation, b) situational context, c) idiomatic expressions, and d) structure (grammar)? We must constantly reevaluate our aims and our methods.[9] Those of us now teaching in universities and colleges are expected to turn out literate products. Are we doing so?

Research and experimentation are also needed in the area of flexible scheduling. All students do not learn at the same rate. Instruction could be more individualized to suit the learning situation desired, permitting variation in length and size of class, according to need.

I am in full accord with Professor Henri Servin, who spoke to the American Association of Teachers of French in 1967:[10] "Whereas linguists look for the mechanical aspect of the conditioned reflex, we look for spontaneous expression of thought within the limits of the acquired material. By doing this the student is able to acquire a means of developing his thought in French, acquisition of which has been stressed many times by such well-known authors as Descartes, Bergson, and Sartre who insist that language learning must go beyond the purely mechanical since the aims of language study are communication or expression of thought. Whereas linguists stress the fact that man spoke long before he started writing, it is also true that past the childhood level it becomes increasingly difficult to disassociate

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[8]See Max S. Kirch, "Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Approach," *The French Retiew*, Vol. xli, 3 (December 1967), 383-385.

[9]See Herbert B. Myron, Jr., "Teaching French Today," *The French Review*, Vol. xli, 3 (December 1967), 390-393.

[10]The statements of Professor Servin were summarized by Professor Jean Goetinck of the University of Arizona and published in *Forum*, 1968, p. 11.

speaking from writing. This is still more so at the university level. Therefore the spoken language is introduced and mastered first, and then immediately reinforced by the written language. At about the fourth week the students begin to write compositions. These are preceded by oral compositions, done in class, which can then be applied as guidelines for their written counterparts. This principle of Multiple Approach allows for valuable simultaneous oral and written work. Always the aim remains the same: an attempt at personal creativity within the limits of the classwork. If then the student is able to express himself in an original manner, freely and correctly, both orally and in writing, the result is tangible and the purpose of the course has been fulfilled."

Professor Goetinck continues: "The method of teaching which Mr. Servin tried to explain to the audience . . . is not quite as new as some people might fear, since it was introduced . . . a half a century after the Cleveland Schools where Emile B. de Sauzé, one of the great teachers of our time, and therefore least mentioned by 'educators', originated it."[11]

In conclusion, lest we be unfair to the "educators" (i.e., those who specialize in the theory of education and the professional core), for we possibly have something to learn from them, let us listen to what they consider a good teacher to be. The following remarks pertain more to high school and elementary teachers than to college and university teachers, but it is often prospective teachers we are training in the universities: "High quality in a teacher is difficult to define accurately . . . It involves good relationships with students and good student achievement. However, the more specific we become, the more difficult it is to be precise for all teachers. Their individual personalities and abilities allow some to do well where others fail . . . The poorest teacher is likely to find public supporters. This indicates some special factors at work, more than just quantities of training and experience which dominate the typical salary schedule. . . . Although it has been said that a good teacher can be determined by waiting ten or twenty years to see what the students do, this would show only the combined results of all teachers and other influences. It would not include the quality of any one individual instructor . . . Some critics of teacher training feel education courses should be de-emphasized and academic training increased . . . Most teaching failures in practice are due to inability to teach, not to lack of subject matter knowledge. [And this is where we may have something to learn.] Teaching experience can be valuable if it does not become an annual repetition of the same thing. It must show growth and improvement. Many students have expressed preference for teachers with less experience if it means a choice between repetition and a dynamic interested personality. Pupils sense a teacher's true feelings very quickly and respond best to a friendly, interested, intelligent, skillful teacher who is in control of the

[11]Ibid., p. 10.

class."[12] Among the ten desirable traits of a teacher listed by a large Iowa teacher training institution for recommendations of its graduates, both new and experienced, knowledge of subject matter ranked eighth. If accurately evaluated, a good teacher would rate high in most of the following areas and the quality of his teaching would show it: effectiveness in planning work, effectiveness in instructional activities and classroom management, neat and orderly classroom, knowledge and use of subject matter, proper use of English, assumption of proper responsibility in the classroom, willingness to help in school activities outside the classroom, relations with coworkers, relations with people in the community, participation in community activities, and professional spirit and growth. A leading Iowa school district uses the above criteria to evaluate quality teaching performance on which to base merit pay.[13]

There is much more to the teaching profession, then, than knowing the subject well, but in foreign language teaching, knowledge of subject matter should take priority, regardless of what teacher training institutions may recommend. Even knowing their skill, foreign language teachers work harder than most teachers in the ordinary curriculum, because their subject matter requires much energy of presentation, much patience and repetition, especially in the early stages. In fact, language teachers work so hard at their jobs that they sometimes forget their public, not only pedagogically speaking, but in what they publish. The very title of a paper read at a recent conference of the RMMLA, "Why Read PMLA?" is evidence of our lack of communication with our public. Should our accomplishments to date and future potential now be ignored and bear no further fruit by abolishing or reducing the language requirement for the undergraduate degree?

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[12]Elmer C. Gast, President of the Iowa State Education Association and Superintendent of Schools, Keokuk Community School District, "What is a Good Teacher?", *The Daily Gate City*, Keokuk, Iowa, December 23, 1967.
[13]Ibid.